

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

REVISED FY 2000 and FY 2001 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLANS

The Office of Communications (OC) was established September 30, 1994, by Secretary Memorandum 1020-40, as a successor to the Office of Public Affairs. OC follows a mandate established by the Secretary of Agriculture in 1913 to centralize information services of the Department. OC leads and coordinates the carrying out of USDA's original mandate, i.e., when Congress wrote the law establishing USDA in 1862, it said the new Department's "general designs and duties shall be to acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of that word . . . "

The mission of OC is to provide leadership, coordination, expertise, and counsel for the development of consistent and timely communications strategies, products, and services that describe USDA initiatives, programs, and functions, so the widest scope of Americans has information that is helpful in their health and economic well-being.

OC provides the Department and USDA agencies with access to high quality, low-cost video, radio, teleconferencing and design services and facilities eliminating the need for each agency to duplicate such services. OC's current organization includes a Communications Coordination & Review Center, a Public & Media Outreach Center, a Video, Teleconference & Radio Center, a Design Center, a Photography Center, a Printing Center, plus a press secretary's staff, speech writing staff and administrative staff. OC's FY 2000 target staff ceiling is 123 FTEs -- 95 from appropriated funds and 28 from the working capital fund. More information about OC's functions and operations can be found in the strategic plan.

This plan represents a modification from the one submitted for FY 1999. As operations continued during the past year, it became apparent that the original objectives identified in the FY 1999 plan were not representative of the full scope of OC's support of USDA's goals. After reviewing the plans of other departments and guidance from OMB, it was determined that a more refined objective and set of means and strategies would be required. As a result, the original objectives and means and strategies were replaced by those given in the following sections of this plan.

GOAL: To support the Department in creating a greater awareness among the American public about USDA's major initiatives and services.

Objective: To coordinate communications efforts of the Department and its agencies, thereby supporting the Department in creating a greater awareness among the American public about USDA's major initiatives and services.

Program Activity: Public Affairs.

(In thousands of dollars)	FY 1998 Actual	FY 1999 Actual	FY 2000 Estimated	FY 2001 Estimated
Funding (Appropriated)	\$8,138	\$8,138	\$8,138	\$9,031
Funding (Reimbursable)	\$387	\$506	\$625	\$669
Funding (WCF)	\$4,637	\$4,877	\$4,904	\$5,064
Total Funding	\$13,162	\$13,521	\$13,667	\$14,764
FTEs (Appropriated)	92	89	95	95
FTEs (WCF)	26	27	28	28
FTEs (Total)	118	116	123	123

Performance Goals and Indicators	FY 1998 Actual	FY 1999 Actual	FY 2000 Target	FY 2001 Target
Ensure that all major policy/program decisions, especially on cross-cutting issues, include communications elements, and written communication plans prior to the announcement of every cross-mission-area initiative or program priority, and prior to launch of single mission or program priorities and initiatives.	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ensure that all customers and employees of OC are treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect. Survey selected customers and employees	YES	YES	YES	YES
OC will ensure the use of all available communications products, technology and techniques to reach employees and all segments of the American public to strengthen public knowledge and understanding of USDA's effective customer services and efficient program delivery to all citizens. Survey OC use of technologies	YES	YES	YES	YES
Random Surveys of selected communications initiatives reveal that intended audience received the material or information distributed.	N/A	90%	95%	98%

Discussion of Annual Performance Goals: The achievement of OC's annual performance goals will support achievement of: USDA Strategic Goal 1, Expand Economic and Trade Opportunities for Agricultural Producers and Other Rural Residents; USDA Strategic Goal 2, Ensure Food for the Hungry, and a Safe, Affordable, Nutritious, and Accessible Food Supply; and USDA Strategic Goal 3, Promote Sensible Management of our Natural Resources. Internally within OC, implementation of these performance measures will promote unity of action necessary for efficient communications from a large, worldwide organization.

In assessing these performance goals it should be understood that the Office of Communications (OC) is a support agency, and as such, an evaluation of its performance does not rely on the quantifying of communications products, but rather, on how well the communication products created/coordinated by OC support the Secretary and agencies, which are the prime initiators of communications products. It is not logical for a support entity such as OC to propose that it will produce more press releases each year or more video products because the needs to the Department and its agencies to disseminate information to the public are ever changing and dependent on such unpredictable variables as weather, plant and animal disease, and health and safety issues. Regardless of the circumstances, it is OC's responsibility to be able to provide the maximum support possible to the Department whether that means being able to produce 100 press releases or 1,000 press releases. This means that an evaluation of a support agency such as OC cannot be focused on a quantitative analysis of what has been produced, but must concentrate on an assessment of their capacity to provide the services required by those entities it serves.

The Office of Communications coordinates and helps produce the products that represent a crucial link in the program delivery process. No matter how excellent the programs, they will not benefit the public unless they know about them, their benefits, and the means to take advantage of them. Knowledge by the general public (and specific publics, including USDA employees) about USDA initiatives, policies, and programs is essential to effective customer services and efficient program delivery and should result in more citizens--especially those in under served communities and geographic areas--availing themselves of USDA services and information that will help them in their everyday lives. Written surveys of customers and clientele of Office of Communications are planned annually to assess effectiveness. More extensive external surveys will be done if funding is provided for that initiative.

For cost accounting, the Office of Communications relies on services through the National Finance Center for both its Working Capital Fund and appropriated activities. Also, the Controller of the Working Capital Fund and the Office of the Chief Financial Officer are reviewers of OC's cost accounting information.

Means and Strategies: OC will focus on two areas: first, coordinating the development and execution of USDA's communications initiatives, in particular as they relate to the efficient and effective delivery of the Department's programs; second, the maintenance of a capacity (in terms of qualified staff and technology) to support whatever communications needs arise within the Department. The means OC will employ to accomplish the above performance goals are:

- ! Conduct reviews of USDA agency communications plans and proposals and develop communications strategies employing the combined resources of USDA and its agencies;
 - ▶ Communications plans describe each mission's and/or agency's role.
 - ▶ All OC units and mission/agency communications staffs are involved in carrying out communications plans.

- ! Be prepared to provide high-quality, low-cost centralized telecommunications, video, photography, and design facilities to the Department and its agencies. This will be evaluated by conducting periodic surveys of OC's use of available technologies;
- ! Ensuring that the public has the maximum exposure and access to information concerning USDA initiatives, policies, and programs by utilizing all available communications products, technology and techniques to maximize USDA's ability to reach all segments of the American public and for the public to access USDA information in the easiest, most cost efficient manner.

Based on internal assessments and feedback results, OC will provide assistance and coordination to USDA agencies in the development and execution of a public information/education strategy that expands on current communication activities and uses all available communications products, technology, and techniques to reach all segments of the American public and targeted audience. This will allow them to take full advantage of USDA programs, initiatives, services, and data related to economic and trade opportunities for agricultural producers and other rural residents.

With respect to the provision of cost-effective services, the existence of centralized telecommunications, video, photography and design facilities saves the Department money since the existence of such facilities within OC eliminates the need for each of the Department's agencies to duplicate such facilities within their own organizational structures. This provides consistency in product quality as well as substantial savings in time and money to the agencies and ultimately the public.

OC will continue to place communications products such as press releases, video and audio material on the Internet. This benefits not only those members of the public with Internet access, but it also allows information multipliers such as radio and television stations to acquire the Department's communications products at a minimum cost.

OC's capacity to fully support the Department and its agencies with the most efficient and effective tools is directly linked to its budget. The increases described below will allow OC to conduct a thorough survey of the public to determine more precise ways to tailor its communications products to the needs of various publics, and will provide the resources necessary to upgrade its technology infrastructure to meet the public's and the media's demand for more sophisticated information products and access. Specifically, increases, will accomplish the following:

- ! The budget includes \$588,000 in FY 2001 for OC to upgrade its technology and provide staff the training necessary to make use of all advances in communications products, technology and techniques so that all segments of the American public may take full advantage of USDA programs, initiatives, services and data. For example, upgraded capabilities would include, making teleconferences, publications, and radio and television recordings prepared for media use directly available to the general public via the Internet. This will dramatically transform the general public's access to USDA materials. Products which were previously available only through the media outlets at specified times or were available to a limited number of participants, will be available at the public's convenience and in a form that will allow for their more effective use. USDA staff around the country as well as the public can access teleconferences on a variety of topics such as, informational programs, policy discussions, technical guidance, and training.
- ! The budget also includes \$70,000 in FY 2001 for OC to improve communications efforts to reach groups working with citizens in under served communities and geographic areas. Funds will be used to design, produce, distribute and analyze surveys of under served client populations and fund audio and video teleconferences with target populations and organizations.

These resources are required to allow OC to achieve strategic goals that fully support departmental goals and to monitor performance with a staff reduced by more than 20 percent since 1993. During this time,

little or no funds have been appropriated to expand communications activities, improve OC's information technology, or to measure OC's performance in achieving stated communications goals and objectives. Funds will be used to add technological enhancements that allow measurement of communications performance (e.g., Internet counters or feedback on use of radio and TV products); train OC staff in the use of the latest technologies; effectively and efficiently provide information to under served client populations; and to obtain a limited amount of consulting assistance to gain specialized skills not currently available on OC staff.

Verification and Validation: Evaluation of outputs and outcomes will be based on internal assessments and feedback from the agencies, and a formal survey of OC's clients regarding its communications efforts. Such assessments and surveys will be reviewed to determine if changes in communication methods or technologies are warranted. These assessments include:

- ! With respect to major communications initiatives, OC will rely on internal assessments and feedback from the Department's agencies who may, depending on the scope and nature of the initiative, conduct surveys as to the effectiveness of the initiative. OC's communications coordinators meet daily to discuss current and future initiatives, assign tasks and review the success of previous efforts. As part of this process, communication coordinators relay comments made by agency contacts to the group as a whole. Particular attention is paid to problems that coordinators had in reaching a targeted audience. These problems are discussed and remedies are included as part of any current or future initiatives. The meetings provide an almost continual assessment of the coordination efforts and immediate feedback as to problems and the integration of appropriate remedies.
- ! Conduct periodic and informal surveys of users, including the media, industry and constituency groups to assess utility and acceptance of the products, and to identify general and targeted audiences' preferred communications products, technology and techniques for acquiring information, and satisfaction with OC services.
- ! OC will employ the National Agricultural Statistics Service to survey a sampling of under served clients and organizations in need of information about USDA's programs if the specific initiative is funded. OC will use survey results and other feedback mechanisms to:
 - Identify need/desire for specific information; and
 - Identify under served client populations' preferred communications products, technology and techniques for acquiring information about USDA's effective customer services and efficient program delivery.

Based on annual feedback from clientele and customers, OC will adapt, modify and execute a public information/education strategy that expands on current communication activities and uses all available communications products, technology and techniques to communicate with under served client populations.

SUMMARY OF OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES FOR FY 2000 (Dollars in thousands)		
	GOAL	TOTAL
Appropriated Funds	\$8,138	\$8,138
Reimbursable Funds	\$625	\$625
WCF	\$4,904	\$4,904
Total Funds	\$13,667	\$13,667
Appropriated FTEs	95	95
WCF FTEs	28	28
Total FTEs	123	123

SUMMARY OF OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS RESOURCES FOR FY 2001 (Dollars in thousands)		
	GOAL	TOTAL
Appropriated Funds	\$9,031	\$9,031
Reimbursable Funds	\$669	\$669
WCF	\$5,064	\$5,064
Total Funds	\$14,764	\$14,764
Appropriated FTEs	95	95
WCF FTEs	28	28
Total FTEs	123	123